

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF BLIND
AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED CHILDREN
IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN
ENGLAND AND WALES

BY
M.J. TOBIN

1979

RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE EDUCATION
OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

HV1944
T554



**M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY
AMERICAN PRINTING
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

C. 7

A Longitudinal Study of Blind and Partially Sighted
Children in Special Schools in England and Wales

M.J. Tobin

Published in:- "Insight", Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1979.

1. Introduction

In September 1973, the University of Birmingham's Research Centre for the Education of the Visually Handicapped began a longitudinal investigation into various aspects of cognitive development and school achievement in children registered as blind or partially sighted. This paper is the first of a series in which it is intended to publish the findings of the enquiry, and provides information about the cohort in terms of chronological age, sex, cause of visual impairment, visual acuity, age at onset of impairment, and other variables that may be germane to intellectual functioning and school achievement.

2. Method of Selection

In England and Wales, children diagnosed by a consultant ophthalmologist as having a severe defect of sight may be registered as blind or partially sighted (criteria for registration are discussed below) and are then eligible to attend a special school (day or residential) for the visually handicapped where class sizes are of the order of eight to fifteen children. This was the designated 'target population' - children registered as blind or partially sighted attending schools for the visually handicapped, but excluding those schools catering specifically for multi-handicapped children. The letter asking for the co-operation of the schools stipulated that the children should be aged five years in the school year beginning 1st September, 1973; a child whose sixth birthday fell on 2nd September, 1973, was a potential member of the cohort, as was the child whose fifth birthday fell on 31st August, 1974, provided that such children were actually in attendance at the special school during the school year beginning 1st September, 1973.

All eight schools for the blind in England and Wales that had such an enrolment were approached, and all agreed to participate. Geographical/financial constraints made it impossible to visit all the schools and units for the partially sighted, but nine such schools, located throughout the North, the Midlands, and the South of England, were asked to take part and all nine willingly agreed to do so. In the event, the 17 schools produced 120 subjects, no child who 'fitted' the specification being excluded. 72 were boys; 48 were girls. 105 were of native British parentage; nine of West Indian parentage; five of Pakistani parentage; and one of Chinese parentage.

3. Population and Sample Size

It is not possible to say with total accuracy what proportion of the population of blind and partially sighted children of their own age the sample constitutes (nor even of the more tightly circumscribed target population as described above). However, some notion may be gained by reference to the

comp. copy 11/13/79

HV7944
T554
open

"Statistics of the Registered Blind and Partially Sighted Persons during the 12 Months Ending 31st March, 1972" (D.H.S.S., 1972). The Register shows there to be 511 blind and partially sighted children in the age range 0-4 years inclusive. The sample of 120 represents just over 23% of that total but as the period in which they were born extends over a two year period from September, 1967 to August, 1969, it would probably be more accurate to use the number 256 ($2/4 \times 511$) as the basis of estimation, on the assumption that the total of 511 subjects noted on the Register are spread evenly over the four year period. This would then suggest that the cohort represents some 47% of their own age-group. Various cross-checks point to this being a cautious estimate, with the cohort probably constituting a rather larger proportion of their age-group, especially when it is borne in mind that the designated target population excludes those children so severely mentally ill, mentally handicapped, or physically handicapped as to warrant care in other schools, hospitals, or institutions.

4. Visual Acuity

In England and Wales a person is registrable as 'blind' if he is unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential, and on the Form B.D.8 which is used for registration purposes it is noted that this disability refers to any work and not just to his own occupation. Visual acuity of $\bar{3}/60$ ($10/200$) or less in the better eye usually constitutes blindness, but where the field of vision is markedly contracted, then acuity of better than $3/60$ ($10/200$) can also constitute blindness.

A partially sighted person is defined as one who is substantially or permanently handicapped by defective vision but not so severely as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential. For educational purposes, partially sighted pupils are those who cannot follow the ordinary curriculum without detriment to their sight or to their educational development, but who can be educated by special methods involving the use of sight. In practice, the criteria generally used are:- $3/60$ - $6/60$ ($10/200$ - $20/200$) with full field; $6/24$ ($50/200$) or less, with moderate contraction of the field, opacities in the ocular media, or aphakia; $6/18$ ($67/200$) or better, when associated with gross field defect (such as in hemianopia) or marked contraction of the field.

Table 1 shows the distribution of visual acuities in the cohort. 53 (44%) have $3/60$ ($10/200$) vision or worse and therefore fall within the range normally associated with 'registration as blind'. However, only 29 (24%) have perception of light or no vision at all.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/longitudinalstud00mjto>

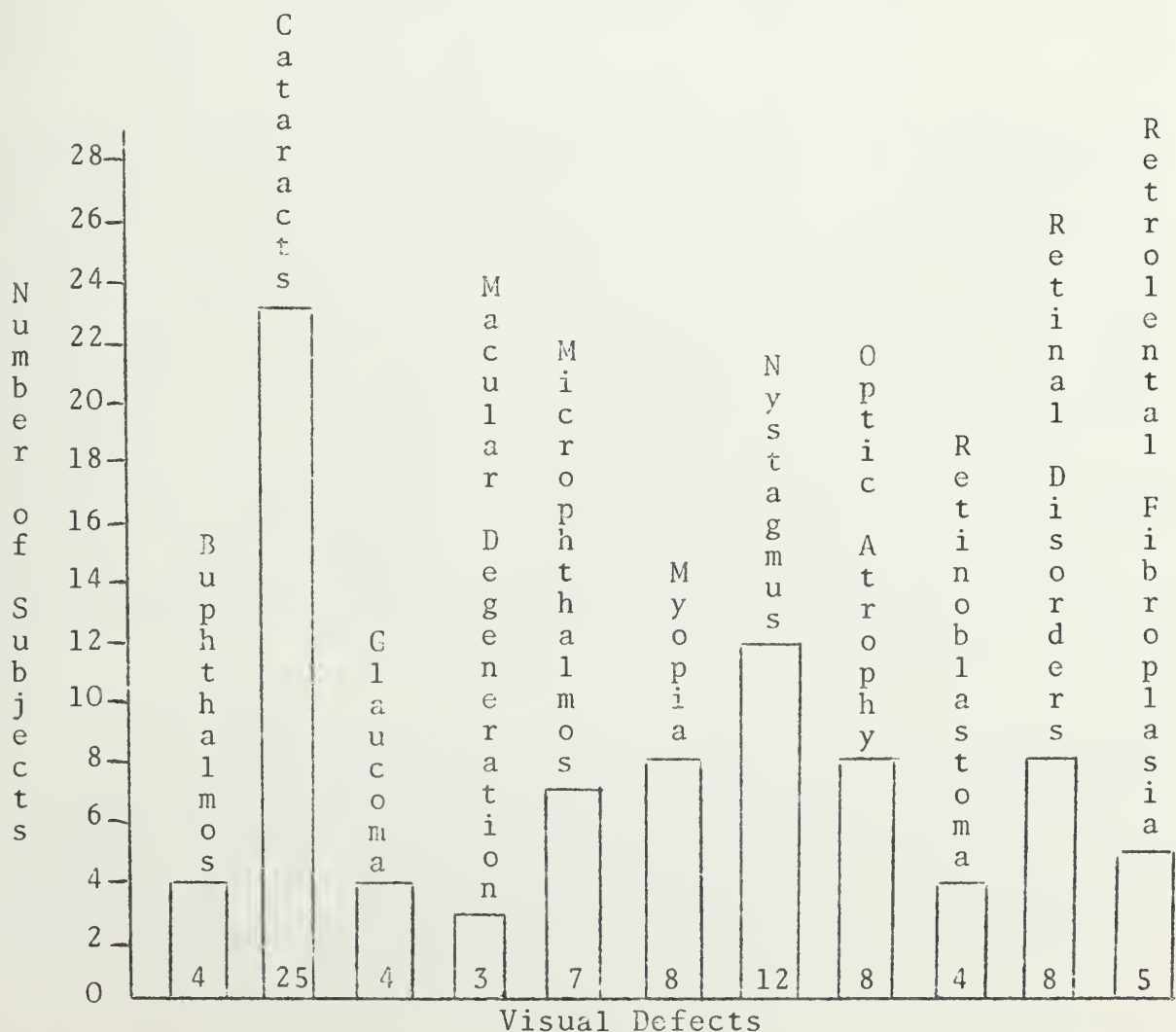
Table 1. Distribution of Visual Acuities

Visual Acuity	Not Adequately recorded	Nil or Light Perception Only	Hand Movements or Counts Fingers	1/60-3/60 (3/200-10/200)	3/36-6/60 (17/200-20/200)	4/36 or Better (22/200+)
Number (N=120)	11	29	8	16	28	28
Percentage	9%	24%	7%	13%	23%	23%

5. Visual Defects

Space prevents the listing of all the visual defects recorded in the school records, ranging as they do from aniridia to vitreous abnormalities. Fig. 1 shows all those defects listed in first place for more than two subjects; many of these, and other, defects were, as would be expected, also listed in conjunction with others. For the purposes of this presentation, however, subsidiary placings have been ignored.

Fig. 1. Visual Defects Recorded in First Place for more than Two Subjects



6. Age of Onset

School records, containing summaries of ophthalmologists' reports, were examined to obtain information as to age of onset of the condition leading to the visual impairment and age of onset of the eye defect itself. Table 2 shows that: in 90% of the cases, the precipitating condition was diagnosed as being present at or before birth; and in 84% of the cases, the age of onset of the visual impairment itself was recorded as being at or before birth. Table 2 also shows that all 120 subjects were assessed as having the precipitating conditions and the visual impairment in evidence before the statutory school-starting age of five years.

Table 2. Age of Onset. N =120

	At Birth	Before 12 Months of Age	Between 12 Months and 24 Months	Between 2 Years and 5 Years of Age
Age of onset of precipitating condition	n=108	n=4	n=4	n=4
Age of onset of eye defect	n=101	n=7	n=4	n=8

7. Additional Handicaps

In what has now become known as the 'Vernon Committee Report' (H.M.S.O., 1972), details are given of the prevalence of other handicaps among blind and partially sighted children. For 1969, it would seem (op.cit., pp.128-129) that just less than 25% of visually handicapped children regarded as suitable for education at school had an additional handicap (other than severe mental handicap). In the present cohort, the incidence is of the order of 21% (25% if albinism is included). Direct comparison with the prevalence recorded in the Vernon Report is not easy but in gross terms the cohort would appear to be not atypical in this respect. The severity of such additional impairments as speech and hearing defects, heart disease, spasticity, epilepsy, mental retardation, etc. among the group was, as subsequent monitoring revealed, rarely so grave as to warrant removal from the 'normal' school for the visually handicapped (one child was later placed in a unit for the autistic and one in a school for the severely mentally retarded).

8. Conclusion

The representativeness of the sample will be a key issue in later discussions about the generalizability of statements and inferences made in relation to performance on the wide variety of tests subsequently administered to the group. In so far as all the subjects were classified as impaired in vision before entry to school, they are not entirely representative of all children attending special schools for the visually

handicapped. Although, as later reports will bear out, there are some who are in the lower ranges of intelligence, there is probably a bias towards the middle and higher levels of intellectual functioning owing to the exclusion of those visually handicapped children attending units for the severely multi-handicapped and those in hospital or other highly specialised settings. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assert that they represent a valid cross-section of children whose disability commences at birth or before the age of five. With these considerations in mind, the writer is of the opinion that it should be possible to make inferences about some aspects of development and achievement that will be valid for visually handicapped children in general.

References

- (1) Department of Health and Social Security. "Local Authority Social Services Departments. Statistics of the Registered Blind and Partially Sighted Persons During the 12 Months Ending 31st March, 1972." D.H.S.S., Statistics and Research Division 6, November 1972.
- (2) Department of Education and Science. "The Education of the Visually Handicapped. Report of the Committee of Enquiry Appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science in October, 1968." London: H.M.S.O., 1972.

1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

2. The second part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

3. The third part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

4. The fourth part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

HV1944 Tobin, M.J. c.1
T554 A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF
BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED
CHILDREN IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS ...
(1979)

Date Due

<i>Reference Copy</i>			

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011

